I am well suited for book learning, as, I think, are most people who go on to be teachers. The classroom environment of studious contemplation works quite well for me personally, and I am enthusiastic about discussing and debating new ideas and concepts with other people. However, I do find certain subject matters quite boring, particularly anything involving a large number of names and dates. I personally find large abstract concepts easier to work with than raw data.

The philosophies that I prefer are Realism and Idealism, a combined philosophy known as Scholasticism, which was invented by Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica*. The purpose of education is to introduce children to values and concepts that are objectively true, and to encourage them to think logically and scientifically about their world and beliefs. Realism and Idealism seem strange bedfellows, in fact many would go so far as to say that they are diametrically opposed to one another, yet they can be united into one cogent philosophy, and indeed they have been. Scholastic educators acknowledge a simple truth about the world. Existence is not a single entity, but a duality. There is both the inner life, composed of the eternal, orderly, and beautiful qualities of man (the Platonic worldview) and the outer world which it is possible to experience, and quantify objectively (the Aristotelian worldview).

Idealism is a philosophy that was initially outlined by Plato in his famous work *The Allegory of the Cave*, in which he proposed the idea that beyond the perceptible world that we can see is a world of forms. The material world is nothing more than a shadow of the transcendental world beyond. The goal of Platonic thought is to bring the thinker closer to universal truth, through the study of literature, art, history and philosophy.

Realism was created as a counter to Platonic Idealism by Aristotle, a student of Plato. Aristotle agreed the end goal of the Plato’s philosophy, the search for universal truth. However, Aristotle differed with Plato on the means by which to achieve the end goal. Plato believed that the material world is a pale shadow of the transcendental world, and that our senses are flawed mechanisms by which to view it as they are colored by our perspectives. Aristotle, disagreed, he believed that the senses are the best apparatus by which to examine the world. Aristotle is known as the first scientist and is credited with the invention of the scientific method.

Realism and Idealism, are known as the objective philosophies, as they theorize that the nature of reality is objectively verifiable, through qualitative and quantitative data. The end goal of people with this philosophy is to reach the state where you understand these objective universal truths. On the other hand, there is a school of thought that proposes that the nature of reality is entirely subjective, that people are so biased that everything that they experience is so filtered through that lens that there can be no objective quantifying of reality. These are known as the subjective philosophies.

Pragmatism is one of the most prevalent of the subjective philosophies as it disdains notion of objective truth and eschews questions of morality altogether. Pragmatism is not an immoral philosophy, it is rather an amoral philosophy. The pragmatist is one for whom reality is either a barrier or an expedient towards their goals, the right approach to problems is the effective approach, regardless of any morals. While this philosophy was created in its present form in the 19th century it is more accurately traced back to the 15th century and Niccolo Machiavelli.

Existentialism is the second of the subjective philosophies, though it takes the subjective nature of reality inherent in pragmatism to a far higher degree. While Pragmatists see the world as constantly changing, existentialists view the world as irrelevant. In other words, the only meaning that reality has is the meaning that human beings ascribe to the world.

It is not enough to have a broad philosophy guiding one’s actions, these broad all-encompassing worldviews must be distilled into specific educational theories before they can be of any real use in the classroom. In the Perennialist mindset, the purpose of school is to teach the eternal truths of the world and to cultivate an inquisitive and rational mind. This theory works well with Idealism, Rationalism, and Scholasticism.

            The perennialist educator sees students as inherently rational beings, who nevertheless need instruction. This educational system emphasizes a combination of the Idealist and Rationalist curricula, with literature, history, philosophy, as well as mathematics (Euclidian Geometry especially), natural science, and physics. There is a great emphasis on morality and on the cultivation of rational thought. Students would be taught to question and to reason logically.

The classroom of the perennialist teacher is one in which discipline in enforced as it is necessary to train the will of students in order to turn them into functioning adults. Order and structure are emphasized in these classrooms. The primary method of assessment is objective examination, and/or essay questions. Classes are conducted like forums, with the primary instructional technique being Socratic Questioning.

  The Essentialist education focuses heavily on rigorous education in a few necessary content areas, specifically those areas that students will find most useful in their future lives. The central tenets of the essentialist education are reading, writing and mathematics.These classes feature lecture and discussion, much like the perennialist theory. Much of Essentialism seems to be a watered down perennialism rather than a fully developed theory of its own. One of the areas in which essentialists differ from perennialists is their attitude towards testing. While perennialists view assessments as a tool by which logic and reason can be applied to content knowledge, essentialists value the memorization and recitation of content knowledge more, hence the increased presence of standardized tests in the essentialist education.

The two philosophies that most interest me are perennialism and essentialism. Perennialism is of course the ultimate goal, the point of knowledge and understanding that we should all strive towards, essentialism strives merely for the basic skills that are absolutely necessary. There is great value and beauty in the realms of literature that lay beyond mere literacy, and there is understanding and order in those mathematics that lie beyond the multiplication tables, they do not, to paraphrase C.S. Lewis, have any survival value, but they are things that give value to survival. The essentialist imparts all of the skills that are necessary, the perennialist imparts that knowledge that students should know. Somewhere between the two is a student worthy of graduating high school.

The general premise behind my classroom design is that the entire class will frequently be participating in discussions, and thus all the students should be able to see each other. The students’ desks will be arranged in a horseshoe, facing a white board. I will stand in front of the whiteboard, alternately lecturing, facilitating the discussion, or writing down the important parts of the discussion on the board.

The motivation in this classroom derives primarily from the fact that most of the in-class time is spent in broad discussion, attempting to answer important, thought provoking questions, this is a time-honored teaching strategy dating back to the Socratic seminar. The discussions will center around political philosophy and the basis of our institutions, not just their workings but the deeper reasons behind their structure, the inherently interesting nature of this content area is sure to engage students.

Most of the graded assignments for this class will be in essay format. The primary form of assessment will be short weekly essays; these will be centered around the content we are discussing in class. These essays will be a way for me to remain apprised of how the students are understanding the content, and will allow me to structure the lessons around the students’ needs. These small essays will also allow the students as much practice as possible writing in the 5-paragraph essay format, which while it can seem stifling to experienced writers provides much needed structure and coherency to novices. At the end of every unit there will be a larger research paper, the topic is student selected and will require research outside of class, this will allow me to teach research techniques during the normal running of class.

The general atmosphere of the classroom should be one of inquiry, I will present a topic, in the form of a question, and the class will work its way towards an answer gradually, through discussion and debate. This challenging and questioning of ideas only works if it is done cordially, and with utmost civility.

The learning focus will be centered around American institutions, and the philosophies that drive them. Through this class each student will attempt to derive their own philosophy, out of many of that populate America’s political landscape. The curriculum focuses primarily on America, because the curriculum of most secondary schools focuses on American history.

While there isn’t a whole lot of technology necessary for a lesson plan based around the Socratic seminar. One of the strengths of the Socratic seminar is that it is fairly easy to implement, and so can be utilized in smaller and poorer schools. Technology can be used as an interesting hook for a lesson, or as an alternative to lecturing, by incorporating quiz games, and other interactive activities.

My job as teacher will be to guide the students towards the information that they need to know. I will provide the basic background data that they need by providing readings and occasional lectures. The most role I will play is that of moderator, asking targeted questions to the class at large to steer their thoughts towards the knowledge that they need.

When reading about various philosophes of education, it is important to remember the context in which they will be used. In the context of a public school, whichever philosophy that a teacher utilizes in the classroom does not dictate how the students’ will acquire knowledge throughout their lives. In fact, the classroom education is merely the start of the students’ acquisition of knowledge, most learning that occurs over the course of a student’s life is self-directed and thus inherently student centered. The classroom education is not the end of the students’ learning it is merely the foundation. Teachers are entrusting to students the accumulated knowledge of all of humanity, or at the very least the important bits. An aeronautics engineer doesn’t begin his career by recreating the Wright Brothers’ experiments at Kitty Hawk, those experiments already happened, and as the basic truths they uncovered hold true today, those truths can be taught, and the aeronautics engineer, can improve upon that work, rather than starting afresh.

If Aristotle’s vision of a purely self-directed learner was possible then there would be no need for teachers, if all knowledge were learned, as walking and talking are, by experience from the cradle, educators would be entirely superfluous. The classroom teacher is, in my opinion, best guided by Aquinas. The teacher’s duty is to spur the development of the students’ intellectual faculties and to impart to them such knowledge as humanity has thus far compiled. Once the student has gained the basic elements of the knowledge humanity already possesses, they can go forth and add to it, rather than having to start from square one. The teacher’s job is to impart the story of Isaac Newton being hit on the head by an apple, and the lessons that he drew on it. The teacher should not throw apples at their class until they spontaneously derive the laws physics.

Student-directed learning has no place in the classroom, in the sense that by the time the student has reached the point where self-directed learning is feasible, he will have no further need of the classroom, and will find exploration of the world according to his interests infinitely more valuable. Once a student has gained enough knowledge that his studies can fruitfully add to the compiled wisdom of the ages, there is no more need for him to be in school.

I disagree with much of the current educational theory in place. Particularly elements of the latest educational theory, that discourages competition within the classroom, I think that is shortsighted, eminently foolish and doomed to failure. There are a variety of tools in an educator’s repertoire, why deprive them of such an effective one? While a competitive learning model is not a good fit for all students neither is a cooperative learning model, I would argue for moderation in educational pedagogy, which, I fear is becoming increasingly factional.

On of the biggest obstacles that the modern educator faces is the bloated bureaucratic nightmare that is the modern public school The introduction of lunch programs, busing, organized sports, as well as codes of conduct and strict behavioral controls on students are all aspects of the public-school experience that are attempts to bolster society by replacing institutions that have largely atrophied. Schools are now being tasked with correcting all of the ills of society by controlling the next generation. Meals provided at school are poor replacements for local charitable organizations that once fed the needy in their communities. Busing and district borders are being used as an attempt to correct racial and socio-economic injustice, in a manner that is so coercive that it most likely created prejudice. Organized sports are created as a replacement for vanished social cohesion within communities, which once naturally provided socialization. Disciplinarian tactics in schools are an attempt to instill in the next generation, the values that previous generations learned at home, or in church. One of the reasons that classic punishments, such as suspension, don’t work is because those punishments used to be accompanied by a parental punishment, nowadays, a suspension is nothing more than a reprieve from school. All of these initiatives have a single unifying common factor, they have nothing to do with education. That’s not to say that these initiatives aren’t necessary, merely that school is not the place to feed the hungry, it is a place to learn. Deviating from the essential mandate of education, carries with it an opportunity cost of learning. I disagree with much of the current educational theory in place. Particularly elements of the latest educational theory, that discourages competition within the classroom, I think that is shortsighted, eminently foolish and doomed to failure. There are a variety of tools in an educator’s repertoire, why deprive them of such an effective one? While a competitive learning model is not a good fit for all students neither is a cooperative learning model, I would argue for moderation in educational pedagogy, which, I fear is becoming increasingly factional.

There is furthermore, a massive bill that accompanies these initiatives. Every bus needs a driver, every lunch needs a cook, every team needs a coach, and this goes further up the chain, every new initiative creates a veritable horde of bureaucrats and a metric ton of red tape. Tacking on these initiatives to schools and not to the broader community increases the cost of school without improving the quality of education provided. Like any academic discipline teaching is in a constant state of flux as various ideological factions continuously debate over the best practice to use in the classroom, I couldn’t care less about any of that. I want to teach students, I want to work in the classroom with my pupils, let the politicians and researchers say what they want, I will do what think is best for the students in my care.

All in all the ability of the educator whose sole goal is to teach, may find his efforts somewhat hampered by the immense diversity of purposes that that the modern education system has accumulated. Furthermore, the money spent on these initiatives is money that the general public assumes is being spent on teachers’ salaries and school supplies, not a massive bureaucratic apparatus that makes the DMV look like rank amateurs.

Since the beginning of this class my philosophy has become much more distinct. My basic expectation is that the students will be attentive and hardworking, and in return the teachers, myself included, would pass along essential knowledge that would be necessary once the students left school. The arrangement of the education system is, at its core, a social contract between the students and teachers. In this social contract the student relinquishes the perfect freedom that they would experience outside of the classroom and in return they gain necessary skills and knowledge. In this way schools are Locke’s republic in microcosm. One of the greatest things that a teacher can do for a student is help that student succeed in spite of themselves. Many of the most challenging teachers are almost universally dislike by the students they have yet they wind up being the most influential and effective teachers. I aspire to be someone who pushes students to the fullest of their potential because it’s best for them, even if that means that the students don’t particularly like me. I hope to help students reach their fullest potential. I hope to make a real contribution to future generations by ensuring that the present generations are well educated and informed.

In conclusion, I personally believe that there are certain universal and objective truths that all students should know. These truths are enduring and universal and as such they are best learned by studying classic literature and philosophers from bygone eras. The end result of such an education should be a logical thought process and a rich pool of knowledge from which to draw. In the case of a social studies class understanding the historical context of many of these thinkers and the political and social environments in which they lived will help students to understand their own.